**Theme 3: Alienation**

From the very first scene of *Catcher in the Rye*, when **Holden** decides not to attend the football game that the rest of hisschool is attending, it is clear that Holden doesn’t fit in. Whatmakes The *Catcher in the Rye* unique, however, is not the factthat Holden is an alienated teenager, but its extremely accurateand nuanced portrayal of the causes, benefits, and costs of his isolation.

In short, alienation both protects and harms Holden. It protects him by ensuring that he will not ever have to form connections with other people that might wind up causing awkwardness, rejection, or the sort of intense emotional pain he felt when **Allie** died. Just as Holden wears his hunting cap as a sign of independence, separation, and protection from the world, he creates his own alienation for the same purpose. Theproblem, though, is that Holden is human. He may wish that he didn’t need human contact, but he does.

So while his alienation protects him, it also severely harms him, making him intensely

lonely and depressed. He therefore reaches out to people, but then his fear of humaninteraction reasserts itself and he does his best to insult ormake the very people he wants to connect with angry at him.Holden has gotten himself caught in a cycle of self-destruction:his fear of human contact leads to alienation, which leads to loneliness, which causes him to reach out to another person, which excites his fear of human contact and leads to a terrible experience that convinces him that people are no good, which leads to alienation… and so on.

***DIRECTIONS: Identify THREE characters who Holden wants to make some type of connection with. Then, describe what he does to alienate himself from them.***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Character | What does Holden do/say to alienate himself from this character? |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |